

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. An electronic rebate system comprising:
  - at least one electronic tag device associated with products, wherein each distinct product is associated with at least one electronic tag, and wherein said electronic tag stores product-identification-information;
- 5 at least one electronic reading device configured to retrieve information from said electronic tag;
  - a first computer in communication with said electronic reading device to retrieve said product-identification-information stored in an electronic tag associated with a product being purchased by a customer at a point of sale;
- 10 said first computer further configured to use said product-identification-information to acquire rebate-claim-information; and
  - said first computer further configured to communicate with a second computer and to transfer to said second computer said rebate-claim-information and wherein said transfer occurs substantially contemporaneous with the purchase.
- 15 2. An electronic rebate system as in claim 1, wherein said electronic tag device is an RFID smart tag.
3. An electronic rebate system as in claim 1, wherein said electronic reading device is an RFID STR device.
4. An electronic rebate system as in claim 1, further comprising a customer interface configured to receive product-rebate-information from at least one of said first computer and said second computer.
5. An electronic rebate system as in claim 4, wherein said product-rebate-information is one of real-time information and near real-time information.
6. An electronic rebate system as in claim 1, wherein said product-identification-information comprises at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) product model number; (b) product serial number; (c) rebate promotion code; (d) product name; (e) identification code; (f) proof-of-purchase code; and (g) an electronic address.
- 5 7. An electronic rebate system as in claim 1, wherein said rebate-claim-information comprises at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) customer name; (b) customer's financial institution tracking number; (c) customer's

account number at customer's financial institution; (d) customer's mailing address;  
5 (e) customer's e-mail address; (f) customer's phone number; (g) customer's credit  
card number; (h) customer's debit card number; (i) a pin code; (j) an authorization  
code; (k) customer's electronic signature; (l) product model number; (m) product  
serial number; (n) rebate promotion code; (o) product name; (p) an electronic  
address; (q) proof-of-purchase code; (r) date of purchase; (s) time of purchase; (t)  
10 product identification code; (u) product information; (v) retailer name; (w) retailer  
location; (x) retailer identification code; and (y) transaction code.

8. An electronic rebate system as in claim 1, wherein said first computer  
is further configured to receive rebate status information.

9. An electronic rebate system as in claim 8, wherein said first computer  
is further configured to generate at least one of (a) rebate status documentation  
comprising at least part of said rebate status information wherein said rebate  
status documentation is given to the customer at the point of sale and (b) a receipt  
5 comprising at least part of said rebate status information wherein said receipt is  
given to the customer at the point of sale.

10. An electronic rebate system as in claim 8, wherein said rebate status  
information comprises at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) rebate  
claim accepted notice; (b) rebate claim denied notice; (c) rebate claim denied  
code; (d) rebate claim reference code; (e) EFT transaction code; (g) e-mail notice;  
5 and (h) rebate check number.

11. An electronic rebate system as in claim 1, wherein said first computer  
is a retailer central computer.

12. An electronic rebate system as in claim 11, wherein said second  
computer is one of (a) a manufacturer central computer and (b) a rebate  
processing center central computer.

13. An electronic rebate system comprising:

at least one electronic reading device configured to retrieve information  
stored in an electronic tag associated with a product being purchased by a  
customer at a point of sale;

5 a first computer in communication with said electronic reading device to  
retrieve product identification information from said electronic tag;

said first computer further configured to use said product-identification-information to determine rebate-claim-information requirements and to acquire rebate-claim-information;

10       said first computer further configured to communicate with a second computer and to transfer to said second computer said rebate-claim-information; and

15       said first computer further configured to receive rebate-claim status information from a remote computer and to present at least part of said rebate-claim-status information to said customer at a point of sale.

14.     An electronic rebate system as in claim 13, wherein said electronic tag is an RFID smart tag and said electronic reading device is an RFID STR device.

15.     An electronic rebate system as in claim 13, wherein said second computer is one of a manufacturer central computer and a third party computer.

16.     An electronic rebate system as in claim 13, wherein said second computer is the remote computer.

17.     An electronic rebate system as in claim 13, wherein said rebate status information comprises at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) rebate accepted notice; (b) rebate denied notice; (c) rebate denied code; (d) rebate reference code; (e) EFT transaction code; (f) e-mail notification notice; and (h) rebate check number.

5       18.     An electronic rebate processing system comprising:  
                a first computer configured to receive rebate-claim-information from a first remote computer;

5       wherein said rebate-claim-information relates to a product being purchased by a customer at a point of sale;

      said first computer further configured to evaluate the rebate claim using at least part of said rebate-claim-information;

10       said first computer further configured to initiate a transfer of rebate-claim-status information to at least one of (a) said first remote computer, and (b) a second remote computer located at the point of sale;

      wherein said transfer of rebate-claim-status information occurs while said customer is at said point of sale.

19. An electronic rebate system as in claim 18, wherein at least part of said rebate-claim-information is retrieved from an electronic tag associated with said product.

20. An electronic rebate processing system as in claim 19, wherein said electronic tag is a RFID smart tag.

21. An electronic rebate processing system as in claim 18, wherein said first computer is one of a manufacturer central computer and a third party computer.

22. An electronic rebate processing system as in claim 18, wherein said second remote computer is a portable customer computer in communication with at least one of said first computer and said first remote computer via a wireless communication connection.

23. An electronic rebate processing system as in claim 18, wherein said rebate-claim-information comprises at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) customer name; (b) customer's financial institution tracking number; (c) customer's account number at customer's financial institution; (d) customer's

5 mailing address; (e) customer's e-mail address; (f) customer's phone number; (g) customer's credit card number; (h) customer's debit card number; (i) a pin code; (j) an authorization code; (k) customer's electronic signature; (l) product model number; (m) product serial number; (n) rebate promotion code; (o) product name; (p) an electronic address; (q) proof-of-purchase code; (r) date of purchase; (s) time  
10 of purchase; (t) product identification code; (u) product information; (v) retailer name; (w) retailer location; (x) retailer identification code; and (y) transaction code.

24. An electronic rebate processing system as in claim 23, wherein said first computer is further configured to initiate an electronic fund transfer from a first bank account into a second bank account in the amount of the rebate.

25. An electronic rebate processing system as in claim 24, wherein said electronic fund transfer is an automated clearing house transfer.

26. An electronic rebate processing system as in claim 23, wherein said first computer is configured to transmit an electronic mail message to a predefined electronic mail address wherein said electronic mail message contains at least part of said rebate-claim-status information.

27. A method for electronically making a rebate claim, said method comprising:

providing at least one electronic reading device configured to retrieve product-information stored in an electronic tag associated with a purchased  
5 product;

configuring a first computer to communicate with said electronic reading device to retrieve at least part of said product-information stored in at least one electronic tag associated with a product being purchased by a customer at a point of sale thereby acquiring product-identification-information;

10 configuring said first computer to acquire rebate-claim-information using at least part of said product-identification-information;

configuring said first computer to initiate a data transfer of said rebate-claim-information to a second computer.

28. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 27, wherein said electronic tag device is an RFID smart tag.

29. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 27, wherein said electronic reading device is an RFID STR device.

30. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 27, wherein said first computer is a retailer central computer.

31. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 27, wherein said second computer is one of a manufacturer central computer and a third party computer.

32. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 27, wherein said product-identification-information comprises at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) product model number; (b) product serial number; (c) rebate promotion code; (d) product name; (e) identification code; (f) proof-of-  
5 purchase code; (g) an electronic address; and (f) a URL link.

33. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 27, wherein said rebate-claim-information comprises at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) customer name; (b) a financial institution tracking number; (c) an account number at a financial institution; (d) customer's mailing address; (e)  
5 customer's e-mail address; (f) customer's phone number; (g) customer's credit card number; (h) customer's debit card number; (i) a pin code; (j) an authorization

code; (k) customer's electronic signature; (l) product model number; (m) product serial number; (n) rebate promotion code; (o) product name; (p) an electronic address; (q) proof-of-purchase code; (r) date of purchase; (s) time of purchase; (t) 10 product identification code; (u) product information; (v) retailer name; (w) retailer location; (x) retailer identification code; and (y) transaction code.

34. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 27, wherein said first computer is further configured to receive rebate status information.

35. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 34, wherein said rebate status information comprises at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) rebate accepted notice; (b) rebate denied notice; (c) rebate denied code; (d) rebate reference code; (e) EFT transaction code; (f) e-mail 5 notification notice; and (h) rebate check number.

36. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 34, wherein said first computer is further configured to generate at least one of (a) rebate status documentation and (b) a receipt, wherein said rebated status documentation and said receipt comprise at least part of said rebate status 5 information and is given to said customer at said point of sale.

37. A method for electronically making a rebate claim, said method comprising:

providing at least one electronic reading device configured to retrieve 5 information from at lease one electronic tag associated with a product being purchased by a customer at a point of sale;

configuring a first computer, communicating with said electronic reading device, to retrieve rebate-claim-tag-information from at least one electronic tag associated with said product;

configuring said first computer to acquire rebate-claim-retailer-information; 10 configures said first computer to acquire rebate-claim-customer-information;

initiating a data transfer to a second computer wherein said data transfer comprises at least one of said rebate-claim-tag-information, said rebate-claim-retailer-information and said rebate-claim-customer-information; and

15 wherein said transfer is initiated while said customer is at said point of sale.

38. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 37, wherein said rebate-claim-tag-information is at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) product model number; (b) product serial number; (c) rebate promotion code; (d) product name; (e) an electronic address; and (f) proof-of-purchase code.

39. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 43, wherein said rebate-claim-customer-information is at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) customer name; (b) a financial institution tracking number; (c) an account number at a financial institution; (d) customer's mailing address; (e) customer's e-mail address; (f) customer's phone number; (g) customer's credit card number; (h) customer's debit card number; (i) a pin code; (j) an authorization code; (k) customer's electronic signature; and (l) an electronic address.

40. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 37, wherein said rebate-claim-retailer-information is at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) product model number; (b) product serial number; (c) rebate promotion code; (d) product name; (e) an electronic address; and (f) proof-of-purchase code; (g) date of purchase; (h) time of purchase; (i) retailer name; (j) retailer location; (k) retailer identification code; and (l) transaction code.

41. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 37, wherein said electronic tag device is an RFID smart tag and wherein said electronic reading device is an RFID STR device.

42. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 37, wherein said second computer is one of a manufacturer central computer and a rebate processing center central computer.

43. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 37, wherein said first computer is further configured to receive rebate status information.

44. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 43, wherein said first computer is further configured to generate at least one of (a) rebate status documentation and (b) a receipt, wherein said rebated status documentation and said receipt comprise at least part of said rebate status information and are given to said customer at said point of sale.

45. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 43, wherein said rebate status information comprises at least one member from the group consisting of: (a) rebate accepted notice; (b) rebate denied notice; (c) rebate denied code; (d) rebate reference code; (e) EFT transaction code; (f) e-mail notification notice; and (h) rebate check number.

5 46. A method for electronically making a rebate claim, said method comprising:

retrieving information from an electronic tag associated with a product being purchased by a customer at a point of sale;

5 acquiring rebate-claim-information;

initiating the transfer of said rebate-claim-information to a rebate-claim-processing-computer while said customer is at said point of sale.

47. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 46, wherein said electronic tag device is an RFID smart tag and the step of retrieving information from an electronic tag is accomplished using an RFID STR device.

48. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 46, wherein said rebate-claim-processing-computer is one of a manufacturer central computer and a rebate processing center central computer.

49. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 46, further comprising the step of receiving rebate status information.

50. A method for electronically making a rebate claim as in claim 46 further comprising the step of generating at least one of (a) rebate status documentation and (b) a receipt, wherein said rebated status documentation and said receipt comprise at least part of said rebate status information and are given to said customer at said point of sale.

51. A method for electronically processing a rebate claim, said method comprising:

associating at least one electronic tag device with products, wherein each distinct product is associated with at least one electronic tag, and wherein said 5 electronic tag is configured to store product-information;

receiving a rebate claim comprising rebate-claim-information for a product being purchased by a customer at a point of sale;

evaluating the validity of said rebate claim using at least part of said rebate-claim-information; and

- 10 transmitting rebate-claim-status information to a computing device at the point of sale wherein at least part of said rebate-claim-status information is presented to said customer at said point of sale.

52. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 51, wherein said electronic tag device is an RFID smart tag.

53. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 51, wherein said rebate-claim-status information is transmitted to a hand held computing device at the point of sale.

54. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 51, further comprising the step of transmitting an electronic mail message to a predefined electronic mail address wherein said electronic mail message contains at least part of said rebate-claim-status information.

55. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 51, further comprising the step of initiating an electronic fund transfer to a predefined bank account upon validating the rebate claim, wherein said electronic fund transfer is in the amount of the rebate.

56. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 55, wherein said electronic fund transfer is an automated clearing house transfer.

57. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 55, wherein the status of said electronic fund transfer transaction is indicated on a receipt given to the customer at the point of sale.

58. A method for electronically processing a rebate claim, said method comprising:

receiving a rebate claim comprising rebate-claim-information for a product being purchased by a customer at a point of sale;

- 5 evaluating the validity of the rebate claim using at least part of said rebate-claim-information; and

transmitting rebate-claim-status information to a computing device at the point of sale while said customer is at said point of sale.

59. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 58, further including the step of associating at least one electronic tag device with

products, wherein each distinct product is associated with at least one electronic tag, and wherein said electronic tag is configured to store product-information;

60. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 59, wherein said electronic tag device is an RFID smart tag.

61. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 59, wherein said rebate claim is evaluated by at least one of a manufacturer central computer and a rebate processing center central computer.

62. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 59, further comprising the step of transmitting an electronic mail message to a predefined electronic mail address wherein said electronic mail message contains at least part of said rebate-claim-status information.

63. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 59, further comprising the step of initiating an electronic fund transfer in the amount of the rebated to a predefined bank account upon validating the rebate claim.

64. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 63, wherein said electronic fund transfer is an automated clearing house transfer.

65. A method for electronically processing a rebate request as in claim 64, wherein a message indicating the status of said electronic fund transfer is indicated on a receipt given to the customer at the time of purchase.